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MEMORANDUM

THE BAATH GOVERNMENT AND IRAQ'S  
MINORITY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The secular Baathist government of Iraq appears to follow a policy of non-discrimination in religious matters. [ ]

Iraqi Christians face the same general limitations on their individual freedoms as other Iraqi citizens. The government, however, has shown some concern that reports of persecution of Christians is damaging its international image and has taken some action to repair the damage. Regular public religious services are permitted, new church construction is allowed, and Christians are free to hold government jobs and membership in the Baath Party. Muslims probably get preference over Christians in hiring and promotions, but this is probably more the result of individual prejudices of Muslims than official policy. Deputy Prime Minister and Revolutionary Command Council member Tariq Aziz, a close associate of President Saddam Husayn, is an example of the heights a Christian can attain, but he is the exception and not the rule. [ ]

The Baathists' prime concern in the religious sphere is to prevent hostile elements from using religion for political objectives. Christians, as a group, probably are regarded as potentially anti-regime. Sketchy reports of executions and mistreatment of Iraqi Christians have circulated in recent years. Some of these reports are probably true, but we doubt if the government acted solely on the basis of the religious preference of the alleged victims. A Christian, for example, was reportedly among those executed last year for Communist proselytizing in the armed forces. [ ]

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Christian proselytizing among Iraqi Muslims, especially by evangelical foreigners, is also frowned upon. The Baathists will be particularly alert to limit such activities because not to do so would make them vulnerable to criticism from Muslim fundamentalists bent on defending the faith from the inroads of the secular Baathist regime.

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